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Observations on the Reliquary Slab Inscription of Gomitra

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1. Description and edition

This article is intended to offer some additional observations on an inscription in Kharoṣṭhī script and Gāndhārī language in the Hirayama Silk Road Museum in Hokuto (accession no. 105111). The inscription has already been published by Sadakata Akira 定方晟 (2003) and is illustrated with a color plate in Tanabe 2007: 227 (fig. VI-41), with Sadakata's transcription and Japanese translation reproduced on p. 297.

The inscription is a fairly typical Gandhāran record of a relic dedication, but it is one of the earliest specimens of this type of inscription, and it also contains some unusual terms and features of particular interest, as will be discussed in parts 2-4 of this article. As noted in Sadakata 2003, no information is available as to its original provenance, but it may be assumed that, like most inscriptions of this type, it comes from northern Pakistan or eastern Afghanistan. According to the information provided in Sadakata 2003 and Tanabe 2007: 293, the schist slab bearing the inscription measures 35 cm in height, 54.2 cm in width, and is 3 cm thick. The slab was apparently originally rectangular, but all of the upper edge has broken off, as well as a large section of the lower right corner and a smaller portion of the lower left corner. Thus four lines of the text (3 through 6) are completely or nearly completely preserved and two lines (2 and 7) are partially preserved, but only very small traces of line 1 survive. There might also have been yet another line at the beginning of the inscription at the lost top of the slab. At the end of the inscription, it is also theoretically possible that there could have been another line after the last surviving one (7), but on contextual grounds this is not at all likely.

The lines of the text are enclosed at the right and left sides by a thin vertical line, remnants of which are visible in lines 1 through 5. On the basis of comparison with the stone slab inscription of Ramaka (discussed below, part 4), we can suspect that there were originally also similar horizontal lines at the top and bottom of the slab, thus constituting a box or cartouche in which the inscription was contained.

Sadakata's edition and translation are as follows[1]:

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[1] In order to facilitate comparison of his and my edition, I have adjusted Sadakata's system of indicating doubtful or reconstructed characters to agree with the system described in n. 3 below. Thus his parentheses indicating uncertain elements have been replaced by square brackets, and his square brackets indicating reconstructed syllables have been replaced by parentheses with asterisk.

vaṣe vatamane ya[d]uX[dra]ya...
prata maheṣiṇa gomitreṇa ṣamaṇeṇa
dhamakasrikreṇa ime śarira pradi-
ṭhavidra tasa bhagravadu śakamaṇisa
(*pratha)map[u]galasa vadidevasa ma-
(*hatmano) s[a]va[sa]pa hidras[u]kha(*ya)

...数え年の...大仙であり説法師である沙門ゴーミトラによって人中
の最高者、神中の最高者、偉大な霊者であるかの世尊シャカムニの
この舎利が祀られる。一切衆生の利益と安楽のために。

The following is an English rendering of Sadakata's Japanese translation[2]:

"... of the current year ... by the great sage and dharma-preacher, the *śramaṇa* Gomitra, was established this *śarīra* of that world-honored Śākyamuni, the highest among men, the highest among the gods, the great spiritual being. For the sake of the benefit and peace of all beings."

Sadakata's edition and translation is expertly done, and I have only a few minor additions and comments to offer; the main purpose of this article is not to improve on his version, but rather to offer additional comments on the historical and archaeological context of the inscription. First, I present here my own edition, which differs substantially from Sadakata's only in the reading and interpretation of line 2 and in the reconstructions of some of the lost portions of lines 6 and 7[3].

1) *? + + [.u] ? ///*
2) *[va]ṣe vatamaṇe ya [d]u[v](*a)daya ? ? ? ?*
3) *pra[ta]-maheṣiṇa gomitreṇa ṣamaṇeṇa*

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3. The transcription follows the orthographic conventions established for the University of Washington Press's Gandhāran Buddhist Texts series, as follows:

A damaged, incomplete, or partially illegible syllable whose reading is less than certain is indicated in square brackets.

A missing or illegible portion of a syllable (consonant or vowel) is indicated by a period.

A totally illegible syllable is indicated by a question mark.

A completely lost syllable is indicated by a plus sign.

A lost syllable or component thereof which can be plausibly reconstructed is indicated in parentheses with asterisk.

The beginning or end of an incomplete line is indicated by ///.

Thus, for example, *[.u]* indicates a syllable whose consonantal portion is lost but whose vowel may be tentatively read as *u*, while *s(*u)* denotes to a syllable whose consonant is definitely *s* and whose vowel diacritic is lost but can be securely identified from context as *u*.

4) *dhamakasikena ime śarira pradi-*

5) *thavida tasa bhagavadu śakam[u]nisa*

6) *(*uta)map[u]galasa [va]didevasa ma-*

7) *(*haṣamaṇasa) [s](*a)[v](*a)sapahiḍas(*u)[kh](*aya)*

"... and in the current year twelve ... attained ... by the great sage Gomitra, the monk and dharma-preacher, were established these relics of that blessed Śākyamuni, the greatest man, the one above the gods [?], the great (*monk), for the benefit and happiness of all beings."

2. Notes on the text and translation

? + + [.u] ? /// (line 1): Because the upper edge of the stone has broken off, nothing remains of the first line except the very bottom tips of three syllables near the beginning, and Sadakata did not attempt a reading of these meager remnants. The second of them, which was probably the fourth syllable in the line, may be part of an *u* vowel diacritic. Other than this, nothing can be made of the text, but the content of the following line, with the end of a dating formula, strongly suggests that this line would have contained the beginning of the date; thus Sadakata speculated that the word *saṃvatsare* should have occurred in this lost line. (See also the following notes, and the further discussion of the dating of the inscription in part 3.)

[va]se vatamaṇe ya (l. 2): Following Sadakata, I understand this as equivalent to Sanskrit *varṣe vartamāne ca*, "and in the current year." In *[va]se*, I again follow Sadakata in reading the first syllable as *va*, although it appears in the photographs of the inscription to consist only of a slightly curved vertical line, lacking the horizontal stroke at the upper left that *va* should have. The context (as explained below in part 3) virtually demands this reading, and there seems to be some damage to the surface of the stone in the area where the missing stroke should have occurred, so this may originally have been a normal *va* which was subsequently distorted; compare the *[v](*a)* in line 7, where the head line is also indistinct, though discernible.

On *vatamaṇe* "current [year]," see the discussion in part 3.

[d]u[v](*a)daya (l. 2): As explained in detail in part 3, this corresponds to Sanskrit *dvādaśa-* "twelve."

? ? ? ? pra[ta]- (ll. 2-3): All that survives at the end of line 2 are the non-distinctive bottoms of about four characters, for which I am unable to propose any cogent reconstruction. After this, *prata* at the beginning of line 3 is presumably the equivalent of Sanskrit *prāpta-* "obtained" or "arrived." The word *prāpta-* and its equivalents and derivatives, including Gāndhārī *sabradu* = Sanskrit *samprāptaḥ,* are commonly used in

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graffiti inscriptions of the type "So-and-so arrived here,"[4] but this is not part of the usual formulary of relic inscriptions. Here, it is most likely part of a compound word which began at the end of line 2 and which probably comprised part of the list of honorific titles of the donor Gomitra. For example, we might tentatively propose something like (*parami-)prata-mahesina, "by the great sage who had achieved perfection" (see the following note). Sadakata similarly proposed reading prata as compounded with the following mahesina, but did not speculate about its possible further connection with a preceding, lost member.

-mahesina gomitrena samanena dhamakasikena (ll. 3-4): This phrase provides the name, Gomitra, and the honorific titles of the donor of the relics which are memorialized in the inscription. The last two titles, samana- = Sanskrit śramana- "monk" and dharmakasika- = dharmakathika- "dharma-preacher," are common epithets of donors or honorees in Gāndhārī inscriptions; the latter occurs, for example, in the Sui Vihār inscription (l.2, dha[rma]kathisya; CKI 147, Konow 1929: 141) and in an inscription on a potsherd from the monastery of Kara Tepe near Termez, Uzbekistan (dharmakathikasa; Salomon 2008: 48 [appendix 2, inscription no. 2]). But the first title, mahesina, is unusual in such contexts. This is certainly the equivalent of Sanskrit maharsi-/Pali mahesi- "great sage," but we would expect to find this as a title of the Buddha rather than of a donor-monk. However, the syntax of this line and of the text as a whole requires that it indeed be taken as a title of the donor Gomitra, who evidently was (or at least claimed to be) a person of extraordinarily high standing in the Buddhist community.

In view of this point, one might speculatively reconstruct the preceding phrase as (*parami-)prata-mahesina. Parami-prata (= Sanskrit pāramim-prāpta) is, to be sure, an exceptionally elevated term to be applied to a living monk, but if Gomitra could lay claim to being a mahesi, there is no reason he could not also be honored as one "who had achieved (*perfection)," or perhaps rather, "... (*the perfections.)"

ime śarira pradithavida (ll. 4-5). This is a completely standard formulation (allowing for the usual variation in word order and inflections) for the dedication of Buddha relics in Gandhāran inscriptions. This exact formula appears, for example, in the reliquary inscriptions of Ramaka (CKI 243). It also occurs, with a different word order, as pratithavida ime śarira in the reliquary of Theodotos (CKI 32) which, as will be explained below (part 3), was more or less contemporary with the new inscription.

tasa bhagavadu śakam[u]nisa (*uta)map[u]galasa [va]didevasa ma(*hasamanasa) (ll. 5-7): This series of epithets of the Buddha Śākyamuni is broadly similar to corresponding passages in other Gandhāran reliquary inscriptions, but shows some interesting variations. Bhagavadu śakamunisa "of the blessed Śākyamuni" is more or less standard, as in śakamunisa bhagavato in the Theodotos reliquary. Here Sadakata read

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[4] For examples in Sanskrit in Brāhmī script, see O. von Hinüber in Fussman and König 1997: 60, 125 no. 5:18 etc.; for Gāndhārī sabradu, see Neelis 2000: 908-10.

śakamaṇisa instead of *śakam[u]ṇisa*, but he noted that the third syllable somewhat resembles the expected *mu* (*"śakamaṇisa のma は、mu と書かれているようにも見える。"*). Although this letter does not have the usual shape of the special ligature *mu* (ᵈ), it is still somewhat distinct from the ordinary *ma* in *dhamakasikeṇa*, and since the ligature *mu* takes a wide variety of different shapes (see, for example, Salomon 1999: 209), and also since the expected reading is beyond question, I think it may be assumed that this is either an idiosyncratic variant of *mu* or simply a miswritten version of one of its normal forms; I therefore read *m[u]*.

The demonstrative pronoun *tasa* preceding *bhagavadu śakam[u]ṇisa* is stylistically slightly unusual, but is paralleled by a related passage in the reliquary inscription of Senavarma, King of Oḍi (line 4b; CKI 249; von Hinüber 2003: 22), which introduces a long string of epithets of the Buddha beginning with *tasa bhagavato* "of that Blessed One," and also in the reliquary of Siasena (inscription B; CKI 358, Sadakata 1996: 309). In all of these cases, the connotation of the demonstrative *tasa* is what a Sanskrit commentator would gloss as *prasiddhasya*, "that [well-known one]."[5]

The remaining epithets, which I propose to reconstruct as *(*uta)map[u]galasa [va]didevasa ma(*haṣamaṇasa)*, are not typical of those found in other reliquary inscriptions, nor are they seen among the long list of epithets of the Buddha in the Senavarma inscription (lines 4b-5b). The first of these was reconstructed by Sadakata as *(*pratha)map[u]galasa*, but I think that *(*uta)map[u]galasa* is more likely, since this and similar phrases such as *uttamapurisa* are common epithets of the Buddha in canonical Pali texts, for example, in Dīgha-nikāya II 166, 7.[6]

The second epithet, which I have tentatively read as *[va]didevasa* and translated as "the one above the gods" is more problematic. My interpretation follows that of Sadakata, who read *vadidevasa* and translated it as 神中の最高者 ("the highest among the gods"), taking the initial letter as a scribal error for the expected *a*. The letter in question clearly has the straight vertical top and right angle with the stem that is characteristic of *va* (ᵧ) rather than the rounded top of *a* (ʃ), but overlapping of forms and confusion between these letters is not at all unusual in some Kharoṣṭhī documents. Such errors are particularly common in inscriptional texts, where the letters were first laid out by a scribe and then incised by an engraver, who may have been illiterate or semi-literate and thus prone to write wrong letters (Falk 1998: 87-8).

If the intended epithet was in fact the Gāndhārī equivalent of Sanskrit and Pali *atideva-*, this is an attested,[7] though not particularly common epithet of Buddhas. But a much more common epithet is the near-synonymous *devātideva-*, "god above the gods," which is applied to the Buddha in late canonical and paracanonical Pali texts such as the Nettippakaraṇa, and especially commonly in the Milindapañha in the stock citation

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[5] In light of phrases such as *ime tasagadasa bhagavado . . . śakamuṇisa . . . dhadue pratithaveti* (ll. 3-5; "establishes these relics of the Tathāgata, the blessed . . . Śākyamuni . . .") in the reliquary of Ajitasena (CKI 334), it is also conceivable that *tasa* in the new inscription is intended as an abbreviation for *tasagadasa* "of the Tathāgata."

[6] For further examples see the *Critical Pali Dictionary* s.v. *uttama-puggala* (vol. II, fasc. 8, p. 370b).

[7] For example, Theragāthā 489d, *[a]tidevassa*.

phrase *bhāsitaṃ petaṃ mahārāja bhagavatā devātidevena* ("and this has been said, O great king, by the blessed god above the gods"). It is thus possible that the intended reading here was *devadidevasa* rather than *adidevasa*, and that the scribal error was not one of miswriting *va* for *a*, but rather the omission of the initial syllable *de*. This suspicion is bolstered by the slightly wider-than-usual space between the *–sa* at the end of the preceding word and the *va-* at the beginning of the one under question, as well as by the presence of what appears to be a crack in the slab, running diagonally across the space in question. In any case, this defect in the stone may in some way have caused the problem with this word, whichever interpretation of the apparent miswriting one may prefer.

In the third and final epithet in this sequence, only the initial syllable *ma* survives at the end of line 6.[8] This word was reconstructed by Sadakata as *ma(*hatmano)* and translated as 偉大な霊者 ("the great spiritual being"). I would however consider a more likely reconstruction to be *ma(*hasamanasa)* = Sanskrit *mahāśramaṇasya*, on the grounds that the corresponding Pali epithet *mahāsamaṇa* is commonly applied to the Buddha in late and commentarial Pali as well as in the vinaya, whereas *mahatta-/mahātman-* does not appear to be so used.[9]

These three epithets—assuming that they have been correctly reconstructed and interpreted—are typical of the ones applied to the Buddha in Pali, particularly in later canonical and para- or post-canonical texts. In this regard, they reflect a stage of literary development which is consistent with the date, around the second or first centuries B.C., to which the inscription can be assigned on paleographic grounds (see part 3). These particular epithets are not, however, typical of the ones applied to the Buddha in Gandhāran inscriptions generally, including (as noted above) the exceptionally long sequence of epithets in the Senavarma inscription. Nonetheless, Fussman's general comments (1982: 37) on the compositional style of that inscription apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the new one being discussed here: "L'inscription de Senavarma est un florilège de citations plus ou moins fidèles, non pas extraites de tel ou tel ouvrage, mais que le rédacteur du texte, à force de les entrendre, de les lire, ou de les utiliser, avait faites siennes et qu'il mêlait indistinctement les unes aux autres."

[s](*a)[v](*a)sapahiḍas(*u)[kh](*aya) (l.7): My reconstruction follows that of Sadakata *(s[a]va[sa]pa hidras[u]kha(*ya))*, on the basis of similar concluding blessings to Gandhāran inscriptions (as well as in many textual sources); for example, *sarvasatvanaṃ*

[8.] The end of line 6 is broken off in such a way that it is difficult to be sure whether there was originally another syllable after *ma*, but what remains of the following surface seems to be blank, so that *ma* probably was the last letter. For reasons explained below, I have reconstructed five missing letters (**hasamanasa)* at the lost beginning of line 7, even though comparison with the corresponding portions of the preceding lines might suggest only four syllables. I think this can be justified, however, on the grounds that the letters in line 7 are generally somewhat closer together than in the preceding lines, probably because the scribe was trying to fit the remaining text into this space.

[9.] This statement is based on data from the Chaṭhasaṅgāyana CD-ROM of the Pali canon, Version 3.0 (Igatpuri: Vipassana Research Institute, 1999). Though common, the compound *mahā-samaṇa* is not listed in the Pali Text Society's *Pali-English Dictionary*.

h[i]tasukhaya at the end of the Qunduz vase inscription (CKI 182). The alternative spelling *s(*u)[kh](*ae)*, however, is equally likely.

3. Date of the inscription

As explained above, the surviving portions of the first two lines of the inscription clearly contain part of a dating formula, although nothing can be made of the meager remains of the first line. In line 2, although the first syllable is apparently malformed or damaged, the following sequence, *-ṣe vatamane*, leaves little doubt that Sadakata was right to read the first letter as *va*, which yields a more or less (see below) normal dating formula. Here *vatamane* must correspond to Sanskrit *vartamāne*, which is regularly used in later Indian inscriptions to indicate that a date is being recorded in current as opposed to expired (*atīte, gate*) years (Salomon 1998: 176). This is however somewhat unexpected here, since there are no other instances, as far as I am aware, of dates being specified either as current or as expired in Kharoṣṭhī/Gāndhārī inscriptions, or in other early Indian inscriptions for that matter.

Still, there is *a priori* no reason that a year could not be so designated in an early inscription, and Sadakata's interpretation of this line as representing a partial date can be confirmed by the subsequent phrase, which I read as *ya [d]u[v](*a)daya*. Here Sadakata read *ya[d]uX[dra]ya...* and hypothesized that *ya[d]u* was the name of the ruling sovereign ("*ya[d]u...は統治者の名ででもあるのだろうか。*"), but declined to attempt a reconstruction or translation. But I think it is all but certain that the phrase *ya [d]u[v](*a)daya* means "and [in the current year] twelve" (or possibly "... in the twelfth [year]"). *Ya* is one of the several well-attested Gāndhārī equivalents of Sanskrit *ca*,[10] and here it probably links the date recorded on this line with another date (or dates) which were originally given on the preceding line which is now almost completely lost. In other words, the date of this inscription was probably recorded according to two (or conceivably even three) different calendrical systems, as was not infrequently done in Gandhāran and other Indian inscriptions (Salomon 1998: 173; Salomon 2005: 365).

There can be little doubt that the following word *[d]u[v]daya*, that is, *duv(*a)daya*, means "twelve" or "twelfth." Although the more common forms of the word "twelve" in Gāndhārī are *duvadaśa, dvadaśa, badaśa, duadaśa*, and possibly *ba(*da)śa* (Baums 2004: 13), the form *badaya* is clearly attested in the Shāhbāzgaṛhī version of the rock edicts of Aśoka (edict III, l. 5 and IV, l. 10) in the compound *badaya-vaṣabhisitena* "when [he] had been consecrated for twelve years." Thus, although *duvadaya* itself is not attested elsewhere, the other forms of the word for "twelve" such as *duvadaśa* and *badaya* indicate that it must be another variant of this word. Although *badaya* in Aśokan Gāndhārī had in the past been dismissed as an error for expected *badaśa* (< OIA *dvādaśa*) on the grounds of the similarity of the characters for *ya* and *śa* in some forms of Kharoṣṭhī script,[11] this is in fact not a good explanation, because in Aśokan Kharoṣṭhī, as

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[10.] See the online Gāndhārī Dictionary (http://www.ebmp.org/a_dictionary.php), s.v., for examples.
[11.] See references in Sani 1982: 151.

in early Kharoṣṭhī generally, these two consonants were entirely distinct: **ɴ** *śa* v. **˄** *ya*. It was only in much later forms of Kharoṣṭhī, not before the first century A.D., that *ya* began to develop an extra slanting or horizontal line across the top (∽), as a result of which in the latest phases of Kharoṣṭhī script (second and third centuries A.D.) the two letters were sometimes indistinguishable.

Thus Sani (1982: 152) was certainly correct to consider the aberrant form *badaya* as a linguistic rather than a paleographic phenomenon, and this approach has been developed by von Hinüber (2001: 174, 191, 266-7) and further explicated by Baums (2004: 14-6), who showed that there occurred in Gāndhārī a phonetic merger of *ś* and *y* in intervocalic postion into /j̄/, leading to alternations in spelling between *ś* and *y*. The additional occurrence in the new inscription of another spelling of the Gāndhārī word for "twelve" with *ya* instead of *śa* in the final syllable thus confirms that Aśokan *badaya* is a legitimate and linguistically significant form and not a mere error or paleographic variant.

As for the historical significance of this date "in the year twelve," we can, unfortunately, only guess. Both the relatively low year number, twelve, and the term *vaṣa*, sometimes used to refer to regnal years as opposed to years of a continuous era (typically expressed by *saṃvatsara-*),[12] suggest that this refers to the regnal period of the current king. But there are no good grounds to guess which king this presumed regnal year might have belonged to, nor what continuous era might have been referred to in the lost beginning of the inscription. One point, though, is clear: on paleographic grounds, this must be among the relatively few Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions of the early period, that is, those which date from the first century B.C. at the latest, and it is quite possibly even earlier than that. The most reliable paleographic index for the date of this inscription, as of Kharoṣṭhī documents in general, is the shape of the test letter *sa*. This letter occurs nine times in the new inscription, and at least the majority of these have the oldest form in which the vertical stem reaches up to the top of the letter to create a closed triangle at the right (ʔ). This shape is typical of the earliest varieties of Kharoṣṭhī as found in the Aśokan inscriptions of the mid-third century B.C., although "its use overlaps with both the later types during the Indo-Greek, Saka, and Indo-Parthian periods" (Glass 2000: 104), that is to say, into the second and first centuries B.C. and even the early first century A.D. In two cases (-*p[u]galasa*, 1.6 and -*sapa-*, 1.7), the vertical stroke appears to end slightly below the head, as is more typical of the intermediate stage of development of *sa*, which is "first seen in the Taxila Meridarkh plate of the Indo-Greek period, but does not regularly occur in inscriptions until the Saka period" (Glass 2000: 106). But it is not clear whether these two *sa*-s actually represent this intermediate type, or are just carelessly written or poorly preserved specimens of the old, closed *sa*. In any case, the strong predominance if not unanimity of the archaic form of *sa* suggests that this inscription could be as early as the second century B.C.

This archaic impression is corroborated by the shape of *ya*, appearing twice in line

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[12] As in the Takht-i-Bāhī inscription dated in the year (*sa[ṃ]ba[tśarae]*) 103 of an unspecified year and the regnal year (*vaṣ(*e)*) 26 of Gondophares (CKI 53, Konow 1929: 62).

2 with the older shape with a point at the top, in contrast to the later varieties which (as discussed above in connection with Aśokan *badaya*) developed a slanting or horizontal line at the top. This pointed variety of *ya* is broadly diagnostic of earlier as opposed to later Kharoṣṭhī, but as a test letter has less precise value than *sa*, since it "is found from the time of the Aśokan inscriptions until the period of the B[ritish] L[ibrary] manuscripts," that is, into the first century A.D. (Glass 2000: 93).

Another point of paleographic interest in this inscription is the fairly consistent use of a diacritic mark consisting, usually, of a short line or curved stroke attached to the right side of the bottom of the stem of certain consonants in intervocalic position.[13] This occurs with *d* in *[d]u[v](*a)daya, pradiṭhavida,* and *-hiḍa-*, and with *k* in *dhamakasikena*. But in the syllables *di* and *du* in *pradiṭhavida, bhagavadu,* and *[va]didevasa* this mark is not applied; evidently, it was only used in this text when the intervocalic consonant did not have any vowel diacritic sign.[14] Although these modified consonants are common in Kharoṣṭhī/Gāndhārī manuscripts of the first and second centuries A.D., they are also attested as early as the reliquary inscription of Theodotos[15] (Glass 2000: 80), for example in *pratiṭhavida*, just as in our new inscription (*pradiṭhavida*). Konow (1929: 2) described this as "one of the oldest, perhaps the oldest of all Kharoshthī inscriptions, with the exception of those of Aśoka, and it can hardly be later than the middle of the first century B.C."

In *dhamakasikena* and *bhagavadu*, the consonants *s* and *g* respectively have a slightly curved horizontal line running across the bottom of the stems. As is often the case with such additional marks in Kharoṣṭhī script, it is hard to decide whether these are phonetically significant diacritics, equivalent in function to the similar ones applied to *k* and *d* to mark a modified intervocalic pronunciation, or whether they are merely decorative foot marks (type 3 in Glass's catalogue of footmarks, 2000: 25-6). In either case, what is of interest here with regard to the dating issue is that this type of foot mark is "quite common in the coin legends of the Indo-Greek period" (Glass 2000: 25) with *ga* and *sa*, among other letters. Thus although they are not exclusive to the early period, the type 3 footmarks are again characteristic of it.

In conclusion, the paleographic features of the new inscription are distinctly archaic. It could not be later than the first century B.C., and could be as early as the Indo-Greek period, that is, around the middle of the second century B.C. This point is of

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[13] In the past, such modified consonants have often been transcribed with an additional *r* in parentheses, on the basis of the resemblance of the diacritic sign to a post-consonantal *r*. This was the convention followed by Konow (1929: 4) in his edition of the paleographically similar reliquary inscription of Theodotos, while Sadakata in his *editio princeps* of the new inscription under consideration here transcribed these signs with post-consonantal *r* (*pradiṭhavidra*, etc.). But it is now clear that this sign is not an *r*, but rather a diacritic modification of the base consonant, probably indicating a fricative or otherwise modified pronunciation in intervocalic position (Glass 2007: 114). It is therefore indicated in transliteration here with a short subscript bar (*k, d*) according to the conventions adopted for the Gandhāran Buddhist Texts series.

[14] The first *k* in *dhama-kasikena* and the second *d* in *[va]di-devasa* are immune to this modification because they follow a morpheme boundary.

[15] Konow (1929: 2) read the name as *theiidorena*, that is Θεόδωρος, but the reading is quite clearly *theudotena* = Θεόδοτος.

considerable interest, as this would put it among the earliest stratum of relic foundation inscriptions, along with the aforementioned Theodotos reliquary and the Shinkot reliquary of Menander.[16]

4. Archaeological context of the inscribed slab

Although no information is available about the provenance or archaeological context of the slab, comparison with Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions on similar objects makes it clear that the stone was the cover of a relic chamber within a stūpa. The best-known example of this type of inscription is the Māṇikiāla stone inscription (CKI 149), which was discovered in 1834 in a stūpa by General Court, who "found, at ten feet from the level of the ground, a cell in the form of a parallelogram, with the four sides corresponding with four cardinal points, and covered by a massive stone, which proved to contain a Kharoshthī inscription on the lower side" (Konow 1929: 145). Like the new one under discussion here, the Māṇikiāla inscription, dated in the year 18 of Kaniṣka, records the dedication of relics of the Buddha.

Zemaryalaï Tarzi has recently documented a similar (though uninscribed) stone slab used to cover a reliquary chamber, found in stūpa 19 at the Tape Shotor site in Haḍḍa, Afghanistan, which he described as "une boîte en calcaire de forme cubique munie d'un couvercle en ardoise" (Tarzi 2005: 258). The accompanying illustration (ibid., p. 284 fig. 15) shows a square enclosure with a groove cut into the inner section of the top edges of the sides, into which is fitted a thin stone slab; this latter is presumably the "couvercle en ardoise." The entire assemblage was then covered by a much thicker slab. The slab of Gomitra, being fairly thin (3 cm), resembles the inner cover of the Tepe Shotor reliquary chamber, and it may, like that one, have been covered by a larger slab. But the Māṇikiāla slab, described as "massive" (Konow 1929: 145), was apparently a single cover for the relic chamber. The inscription was written on the underside, presumably so that it would be enclosed within the relic chamber together with the reliquary and the relics themselves, and we can guess that Gomitra's inscription was similarly oriented.

Another inscribed relic-chamber cover slab records the relic dedication of Ramaka, dated in the year 74 of Azes = A.D. 16/17 (CKI 251). Fussman (1980: 6) noted that "[l]a plaque est analogue à celle trouvée dans le stūpa de Māṇikiāla," and further observed that "[e]lle est divisée en neuf rectangles par quatres lignes se coupant à angle droit." Here we have a striking parallel with the new inscription, in which vertical lines enclosing the inscribed portion of the stone are also visible on the surviving portions of the right and left edges. By analogy with the Ramaka inscription, we can suppose that there would have also been horizontal lines across the top and bottom of the inscribed area, but these are totally lost. According to Fussman (ibid.), in Ramaka's inscription "[l]e rectangle central était apparemment destiné à contenir l'inscription, mais celle-ci, dès la ligne 11, déborde du cadre qui lui était réservé." The inscription is continued by two lines

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[16.] The inscription of the time of Menander on the Shinkot reliquary has recently been denounced by Falk (2005: 349-53) as a forgery, but I am not convinced by his arguments and continue to consider it a genuine early Gandhāran inscription.

in the upper margin, which are, surprisingly, upside-down in relation to the principal portion of the inscription.[17] In the new inscription, however, as far as can be determined from the surviving portions, the entire text was included within the ruled area.[18]

Finally, a related type of inscription, reported to have come from "Shāhi Koṭ near Torkham, 30 km south-east of Jalalabad in Afghanistan" (Falk 2003: 71), has also recently been published. In this case, the relic chamber was constructed not of separate stone slabs fitted together, but as a square opening carved into a single block of schist. The inscribed slab served as a cover for this chamber, and, to judge from the illustration in Falk 2003: 83, fig. 1, it was set into a lip around the upper edge of the opening. The cover slab measures 17 cm wide, 18 cm high, and 2 cm thick, and thus is considerably small than Gomitra's slab. Unlike the other inscriptions of this type, this stone is inscribed on both sides. The lower side contains an inscription dated in the year 20 of an unspecified era which may be reasonably identified as that of Kaniṣka (Falk 2003: 72), so that the inscription would be very close in time to that on the Māṇikiāla inscription of the Kaniṣka year 18. This part of the inscription contains the usual relic donation formula (. . . *pratiṭhavite bhagavada dhadu-śarira mitravarmasa thubami* . . . , etc.; ". . . the body-relics of the Blessed One were established in the stūpa of Mitravarma . . ."). On the upper side of the relic slab, near one corner, are three letters, apparently intended to read *budhasa*, although, as noted by Falk (2003: 71) "the last letter looks more like a *va*" (or perhaps rather *ra*).[19]

In conclusion, the reliquary slab of Gomitra provides us with the earliest known

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[17.] On the interpretation of this concluding passage, see Salomon 2000: 65.

[18.] The Ramaka slab has another interesting peculiarity, described by Fussman (ibid.) as follows:

> On a pratiqué dans cette plaque une encoche qui a fait disparaître quelques *akṣara* au milieu des l. 10 et 11, mais qui est antérieure à la gravure de la l. 12 puisque l'on ne constate pas de lacune entre les l. 12 et 13. On admettra donc que le texte a été gravé sur la plaque, partiellement réglée et portant une encoche ne mordant pas sur le rectangle centrale. Lorsqu'on a voulu placer le reliquaire dans cette encoche, celle-ci s'est révélée trop petite et il a fallu en rogner les bords aux dépens de quelque *akṣara* des l. 10 and 11.

Here Fussman is certainly correct that the notch (*encoche*) in question must have been enlarged after the stone had been inscribed in order to fit something into it, but I doubt that this object was the reliquary. This seems to be contrary to what we know from other cases, such as the ones discussed above, where a relic chamber was covered with a stone slab. Surely the reliquary would have been placed in the chamber first and then covered with the slab; to set the cover in place first, leaving a hole in it in order to insert the reliquary which the slab was intended to cover and protect, would be a strange procedure. It is therefore tempting to think that the hole in the cover stone was meant to accommodate the base of a shaft or pillar, perhaps somehow connected with or related to the *yaṣṭi* atop the stūpa, though this theory is admittedly hard to justify on archaeological grounds. Conceivably, such an interior shaft could have been a secondary *yaṣṭi* such as has been hypothesized by Combaz (1935/6: 51) in connection with the much-discussed and controversial description in the Divyāvadāna (p. 244, lines 6-14; discussed by, among others, de La Vallée Poussin 1937, Weller 1953, Alsdorf 1955, Kuiper 1959, and Roth 1980) of the renovation of the stūpa of the Buddha Kṣemaṅkara by the merchant Kṣema: "il semblerait qu'il y ait deux mâts pouvant se faire suite." There may also be a connection with the Sui Vihār copper plate inscription (CKI 147), which refers to the construction of a *yaṣṭi* of, or for, the monk Nāgadata (line 2, *bhikṣusya nagadatasya dha[rma]kathisya ... yaṭhim aropayata*). Major Stubbs's rather unclear description of the ruins of the Sui Vihār stūpa (published in Dowson 1870: 498 and Bayley 1870: 65-6, and cited in Konow 1929: 138) refers to a "shaft," apparently below the relic chamber which contained the inscribed copper plate, which could conceivably have contained such a secondary *yaṣṭi*.

[19.] Falk (2003: 71) notes that inscribed stone reliquary covers have also been found at Bhaṭṭiprōḷu in Andhra Pradesh, although these are quite different in form from the Gandhāran specimens under discussion here.

example of a special sub-genre of Gandhāran relic dedication inscription, namely those in which the text was recorded on the cover slab of the chamber containing the reliquary, instead of on or in the reliquary itself as was more commonly the case. Moreover, it is among the earliest Gandhāran relic inscriptions of any type, dating from, at the latest, the first century B.C.

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